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## AUBREY BEARDSLEY FROM A JAPANESE STANDPOINT



OR the introduction to our public of Aubrey Beardsley we are indebted to the young American, Henry Harland, the editor of The Yellow Book. Before the appearance of this glaring quarterly, supposed to be a unique exemplification of "modernity," Beardsley's pen-and-ink drawings were scarcely known on this side of the Atlantic. It is all the more strange that, within a single year, he not only called forth a strong group of imitators, as seen in recent newspaper illustrations and obtrusive posters—one of those mushroom schools which are continually springing up in modern art—but has exercised an influence on public taste in general. One might observe this in such peculiar idiosyncrasies as the dull hangings of some of our interiors, or, for instance, the introduction, by some lady of advanced inclinations, of a square pincushion, small in size but with immense bows at the corners. Some of the foremost designers of artistic furniture in New York City have even thought seriously of initiating their customers into the grotesque art of the English draughtsman by inventing chairs with exceedingly low seats and extremely high backs, or tables with extraordinarily low legs and very small tops.

It is difficult to explain the cause of this sudden fad, as difficult as to trace the origin of the Napoleonic wave that has swept over this country of late. Both, the revival of the Empire style and the black-and-whites of Beardsley, have a certain affected simplicity in common, and may attract simply because they appear new and original without being reformatory, qualities which the pleasure-seeking public is always ready to welcome.

And there is no denying that Beardsley is struggling and jostling to attain fame in the very vanguard of originality. His drawings attract at first by their oddness, their peculiar composition, their extravagant flourishing lines, the quaint incidents they depict, the ugliness of the faces, their utter disregard for the truthfulness of form and the startling treatment of black and white masses. At a second glance the majority of people will smile and turn away indifferently or be slightly disgusted, but nearly all, even if their aesthetic feeling has been aroused to severe criticism, will allow that the drawings are clever, and one often hears the remark that they are "very much like Japanese art." To investigate this statement in a comparative study is the main object of these lines.

Aubrey Beardsley, considered from the point of view of draughtsmanship, has some remarkable qualities; he has an exquisite sense of beauty in drawing curves, and facility and wealth in ornamental

invention. In his illustrations of the "Morte d'Arthur" and Oscar Wilde's "Salome," both far superior, because more sincere, to his pages in The Yellow Book, he has shown that he has scarcely a living rival in this specialty unless it were Carloz Schwabe in Paris. These traits, however, are of pre-Raphaelite origin.

His principal similarity with the Japanese lies in his ability to get, like them, all desired effects by an extreme economy of means, by simple outlines and flat tints. At a closer scrutiny, however, a decided difference is perceivable. Look at a Beardsley drawing. How carefully everything is studied out, with what scrupulous mechanism each detail is drawn, how labored it all looks. Where are the easy grace, the spontaneity, the suggestive touches of the magic brush of the Japanese artist! Look at Beardsley's "Siegfried," "L'Education Sentimentale," "The Mysterious Rose Garden"—they seem to have lost all their freshness in the slow process of their execution.

The Japanese element in his graphic art seems to be merely affectation, and undoubtedly is so in the intent, because Beardsley, who is décadent to his finger tips, knows exactly that just such an affected style, abounding with mannerism, could give the best expression to his cynical comments upon society,—those mysterious, morbid insinuations that have nothing to do with the reproduction of visible reality. And in this conscious catering to notoriety in technical expression Beardsley clearly shows that he is merely a superficial imitator of those canons of the Japanese in regard to drapery and the human form which date from the Chinese, without comprehending them in the least. He has adopted the Japanese method without entering into its spirit. For, however conservative to the formal methods of the past (unintelligible to us) the Hokusais may remain, and however grotesque, allegorical and exaggerated Japanese art may appear at times, it is always honest, vital, dignified, beautiful and a mirror of truth, while Beardsley gives us nothing but vulgar, ill-tempered caricatures, garrulous with flippant morbidities, because void of all higher aspirations.

He does not introduce us into the every-day or legendary life of the people, brightened by flashes of native humor that repetition cannot spoil, but into a sad, satiated world of black-and-white, peopled with fairy and demon-like creatures with idiotically staring eyes and sensuous, drooping under lips, garbed in quaint imaginary costumes with a tendency to balloon-like distension. And these idiosyncracies of his brain, shadows of human beings, all out of proportion, move wearily in surroundings that are likewise out of proportion, as if seen by an epileptic to whom objects at times appear a good deal larger or smaller than they are in reality. Not only do his figures in the "Comedy Ballet of Marionettes" of the "Théâtre Impossible" resemble marionettes, but all his delineations of human beings look like puppets.

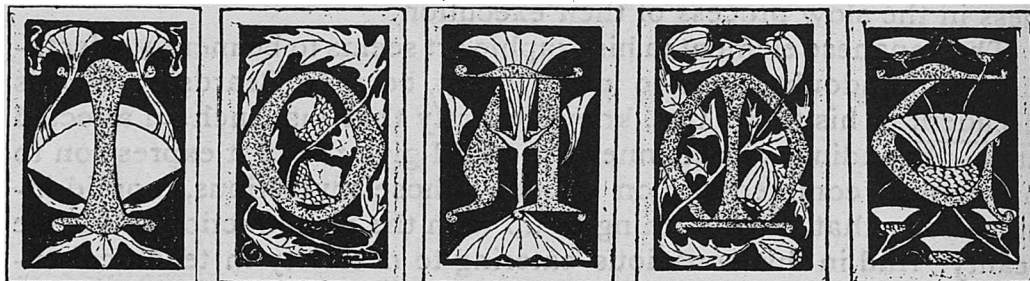
AUBREY  
BEARDSLEY

Particularly deficient are his portraits, in which he generally pays the least attention to the physiognomy. The Japanese have succeeded in conveying the characteristics of a personality by painting the sitter stooping, or sitting with his back towards the spectator, but it is doubtful whether anybody would recognize the charming Miss Winifred Emery or the greatness of Mme. Réjane in Beardsley's delineation, were their names not written beneath.

Nevertheless, despite his shortcomings, Beardsley's productions cannot be simply put aside as ephemeral, cunning novelties. They will maintain their place, if it were only for the fact that no other artist has ever dared before to record the errors, the eccentricities of a modern youth in such an ingenuous, startling fashion, thus adding one more interesting case to our modern art, so rich in pathological apparitions.

"Sadakichi"

THE FIRST PRIZE  
"Croy"  
Charles William Crosby  
Croydon, England



INITIALS AND TITLE PAGES: THE RECORD OF THE  
FIRST MODERN ART COMPETITION ♣ BY J. M. BOWLES

My original intention was to print this whole competition report back among the advertising pages, following "Echoes," but the results as shown here have been such a surprise, and have seemed to me to contain a suggestion for our art schools, so that I feel justified in giving up several pages of the magazine to reproductions of the most interesting of these amateur designs. The competition was somewhat widely advertised by means of circulars announcing it which were sent to students of art schools, not only here but in England. The number sent abroad was so small, being only a small proportion of the total, that we were not at all prepared for the result, which is that both the prizes which were awarded went to England and nine-tenths of the designs worth considering also came from

THE SECOND PRIZE  
"Ivory Black"  
Mary Elizabeth Dawson  
Bingley, England

